

GULLIBLE COMPASSION

Klu thar rgyal ཀླ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

Nor mtsho moved the flap of her tent to one side and walked outside. Her right hand gripped the handle of a wooden bucket with a bit of water in the bottom. From the front of her sash hung a milk hook that looked very old. The silver in the hook made it attractive. It suited her daily robe. She walked to where the milk yaks and *mdzo mo* 'female yak-cow hybrids' were kept, next to her tent. She released a tethered calf, which rushed to the yaks, found its mother, and started enthusiastically nursing while swinging its tail from side to side.

It was late afternoon. Nor mtsho gazed around. Neighboring children were driving their family's yaks back to the camp from the mountains. After no more than a minute, Nor mtsho pulled the calf back and tied it again with a rope. She hung her milk-bucket on the milk-hook in front of her, bent forward a bit, and washed her hands with water that she emptied from the milk bucket. Next, she squatted on the left side of the *mdzo mo* the calf had just nursed. She leaned her head against the *mdzo mo* and began milking into the bucket while softly singing a milking song that only she and the *mdzo mo* could hear.

Hearing the revs of an engine Nor mtsho paused, wondering who it might be. She stood and saw her neighbor with a white-capped man behind him on his motorcycle. Neighbors were planning to sell some of their yaks. Nor mtsho's family had discussed selling some old yaks, including the *mdzo mo* that she was now busy with. She had been milking it for more than ten years.

Nor mtsho's family had to sell some of the yaks to repay a bank loan and its interest. Years ago, many locals borrowed money from the bank. Seeing such a great opportunity, her husband also borrowed 10,000 RMB and signed a contract in Chinese, which he didn't

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understand. He didn't care since it didn't stop him from borrowing money.

Years passed, and he did not repay the loan. He had forgotten all about it. However, two years ago, the local bank and government informed the family they now needed to pay more than 20,000 RMB because the loan interest had increased over the years. Last year, some local officers came and warned the family that they would drive away half of her family's yaks if they didn't pay all the money by winter.

The neighbor came to Nor mtsho's tent with the buyer as she was about to milk the last yak. The neighbor said he had sold eight yaks for a good price. The merchant offered prices higher than Nor mtsho expected for eleven of her yaks, including the old *mdzo mo*. She refused to sell because she knew the yaks and *mdzo mo* would be slaughtered.

The next day, a younger, hatless buyer came. He promised to milk, not slaughter, the *mdzo mo* and other milk yaks for a while. Believing him, Nor mtsho decided to sell him the same yaks even though he offered a very low price.

When the young, hatless merchant was about to drive the *mdzo mo* and other old milk yaks away, Nor mtsho pulled out some of their hair to remember their contribution to her family over the years. That night, she dreamed of milking the *mdzo mo* and the other, older milk yaks. She felt better recalling the buyer's assurance he would feed them well because they would be milked, not slaughtered.

A few more days passed. At mid-morning, Nor mtsho observed the older, hatted buyer seated by the younger hatless man, who was driving a big truck full of yaks. She soon learned that the pair were a father and son team and that she had been tricked.

TIBETAN TERMS

klu thar rgyal ལུ་ཐར་རྒྱལ།

mdzo mo མཛོ་མོ།

nor mtsho རོར་མཚོ།